

Sustainable Europe 2030. Perspectives on European Public Dialogues.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

thank you all for coming today, and thank you, esteemed speakers, for opening this Athens Sustainability Outlook with your valuable thoughts.

“We are the first generation that can end poverty and the last that can end climate change.” These remarks by former Secretary-General Ban-Ki Moon express the most positive picture we can have when we talk about sustainability. And it is an honour to discuss today at this place, where, at the foot of the Acropolis, French President Emmanuel Macron once held his speech on creating a European vision together. That was two years ago. I consider this conference to be one brick toward building such a vision. We need to create a European public. We don’t have it yet, but we need it. We are under pressure from two sides: on the one hand from the younger generation, who is questioning our actions with respect to combating climate change, and on the other from those who aren’t seeing the advantages of a globalized world. After the globalization of economies and business, we now need a globalization of societies.

A stronger commitment to sustainable development in Europe needs a strong commitment to multilateralism. We need a Europe that takes positive action. The European Commission’s Reflection Paper describing the pathway to a Sustainable Europe 2030 is an invitation to public dialogue. We need an overarching strategy and an SDG Agenda, a strategic approach for Europe, in order to meet these targets. Only what gets measured, gets managed.

Optimism for the future is based on long-term relationships and trust. Threats of leaving the Union are poison. Everyone running a business and creating trust-based stakeholder dialogue knows that. The lines of conflict run throughout societies, business, politics, administration and the scientific community. We have to look for the agents of change, the agents that act on behalf of an open, inclusive, low-carbon economy in which people can live a good life in hope and peace and where no one is left behind.

For seven years now, we have been collaborating with the QualityNet Foundation – and Chrysoula Exarchou in particular. Throughout this time, we have enjoyed a true learning partnership. Not only in that she took the Sustainability Code and adopted it for the Greek market, but also vice versa, in that we learned about success factors of implementation:

- The market approach is crucial;
- Develop systematic dialogue; and
- Stay the course: be decisive and clear in what you are doing.

If the SDG Agenda is to become reality, we need to have the tools and instruments for implementation. Talking is good. Acting is even better. Let us create spaces for collaboration and participation, where diverse approaches, the various situations and contexts are taken into account. The main challenge for Europe is that we have to tolerate that many, sometimes contrary trends run in parallel. Let us focus on the positive ones!